

Does The Hadith, “The Dead Is Punished Because of the Lamentation of His Family” Contradict the Qur’an?

by

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Argument:

The hadith literature cites the Prophet Muhammad as saying, "The dead is punished because of the lamentation of his family" [Saheeh Muslim, Book 4, Hadith 2022]. Does this not contradict the Qur'an, which states, "No bearer of a burden will bear another's burden" [35:18]?

Response:

This is a valid question, for even confusion regarding this matter arose among some companions, including the Prophet's wife, Aisha. The confusion arose mainly due to how some of the companions were transmitting these words of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The problem was that they were being relayed in the absolute general sense without clearly informing the people whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) was specifically referring to.

Who was the Prophet (peace be upon him) specifically referring to when he said, "The dead is punished because of the lamentation of his family"?

The majority of the scholars say that this refers to someone who influenced his family either directly by asking them before he dies to lament his death or indirectly by doing so himself when someone dies and acting as a role model for his family to follow suit. It is an established historical fact that this was common practice amongst the Arabs back then.¹ So given that he would have influenced their behavior to do this, by default, he would also be responsible for their actions and be punished as a result. This would not violate the Qur'anic verse regarding Allah not punishing people for the sins of others, as the person is being punished for a sin he has committed.

Some early scholars, such as Imam at-Tabari, and several later scholars such as Qadi 'Iyaadh, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibnul Qayyim, etc., understood the statement of the Prophet, "The dead is punished because of the lamentation of his family" differently. They did not understand "punished" as connoting "being punished for a crime," but rather understood it as "suffering." They believed that the person in the grave would emotionally suffer by being exposed to the lamentations of his family. They base this on a hadith transmitted by at-Tabarani, Ibn Abi Shaybah, and others

¹ Ibn Mandhur in his *Lisaan al-Arab* cites Ibn al-Atheer as saying:

يشبه أن يكون هذا من حيث أن العرب كانوا يوصون أهلهم بالبكاء والنوح عليهم وإشاعة النعي في الأحياء، وكان ذلك مشهوراً من مذاهبتهم فالميت تلتزمه العقوبة في ذلك بما تقدم من أمره به

where the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that we should not make our loved ones suffer, as they would be exposed to our lamentations.²

In summary, when looking at the historical context and other narrations as a whole, along with the statement of the Prophet (peace be upon him), we come to know that there is no necessary contradiction present here.

² Ibn Hajar said that the isnaad is hasan. He said:

قلت : يا رسول الله ، قد ولدته فقاتل معك يوم الربرة ، ثم أصابته الحمى فمات ، ونزل علي البكاء ، فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم : أيغلب أحدكم أن يصاحب صويحبه في الدنيا معروفا ، وإذا مات استرجع ، فولذي نفس محمد بيده ، إن أحدكم ليبيكي فيستعبر إليه صويحبه ، فيأبى عباد الله ، لا تعذبوا موتاكم . وهذا طرف من حديث طويل حسن الإسناد ، أخرجه ابن أبي خيثمة ، وابن أبي شيبة ، والطبراني وغيرهم ، وأخرج أبو داود ، والترمذي أطرافا منه

This hadeeth finds some support in meaning from the statement of Abu Hurayrah where he said that the works of relatives would be displayed to the dead. Ibn Hajar said:

قال الطبري : ويؤيد ما قاله أبو هريرة أن أعمال العباد تعرض على أقربائهم من موتاهم ، ثم ساقه بإسناد صحيح إليه ، وشاهده حديث النعمان بن بشير مرفوعا ، أخرجه البخاري في تاريخه ، وصححه الحاكم